

FAQ—FIBER OPTIC BROADBAND FOR LUBEC



Strong, reliable and affordable internet is our bridge to the future for Lubec.

What is Fiber Optic Broadband Internet?

Q. What are we talking about here anyway?

A. We use internet for many things: television, email, gaming, social media, research, streaming video, video conferences or “zooming” with family. All of these require more and more capacity in order to arrive at your house smoothly, and to leave your house crisply. The more devices and programs you have using your internet connection, the more “bandwidth” is taken up. We talk about speeds for both download (your favorite movie) and upload (your home video of the Disney trip). Speeds usually are not “synchronous”, that is, the download speed may be 50 to 100 mbps but the upload may well be only 5 or 10 mbps. With synchronous service your family video will upload to show the grandparents as fast as your favorite sports game downloads.

Q. Why fiber?

A. Fiber optic internet systems are the future. The fiber optic benefits over other technologies, including DSL and co-ax cable and fixed wireless are well acknowledged as to speed, expense and durability. Over the long run fiber is the less expensive and more scalable of the technologies.

Satellite, such as Starlink, is an expensive option. It was never intended for universal outreach, but as a solution for seriously isolated locations. It is expensive both in the set up and the monthly fees. It also needs a clear access to the sky, and can often drop service in severe weather.

Fiber is scalable. That means the speed and bandwidth will readily grow, and with more users will likely become even less expensive. And, funding to support broadband fiber networks continues to be available.

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What's in it for people who subscribe?

Q. Will I have better internet service than I have now?

A. It depends on where you are, and how much you are paying. If you are in town, or along County Road, your service may be sufficient for your needs. This service will likely be as fast, more consistent and less expensive. However, if you are using a cable service further out of town and off the highway, having a fiber optic network running along your road, will most definitely offer better, stronger, synchronous service, and most likely more affordable. If you are considering or using satellite service, you will likely find fiber far less costly, with consistently better service.

Q. Will I be required to take this service if the Town puts it in place?

A. Absolutely not. You can keep right on using your current service if you prefer. However, we hope our citizens will support this town owned fiber service reaching throughout Lubec. Even if you have adequate current service in town or along County Road, your friends and family further out of town do not. Those areas are not profitable to the current providers.

Q. Will I be able to get service out Coffin's Neck, or Straight Bay, or Boot Cove?

A. Yes, and this is the great benefit to this broadband fiber network. This infrastructure will run along every road in Lubec. This can also include private roads where poles are already in place. And, fiber doesn't get slower as you get further away from the source the way DSL does; the end of the road will have service as good as that on County Road.

Q. Will this service increase my taxes?

A. No, the proposal model is tax neutral. The build out will be supported by grants, and likely a small bond that will be paid through the subscribers to the service. We will be monitoring the costs and the coverage by subscribers every step of the way. There may be a payment on a bond that comes due prior to full build out, but that money will come back to the town through subscriptions.

Q. Does this service require any special "box" or adapter or brand of TV to get connected to the streaming content? Is there equipment to be leased?

A. Keep in mind that television or streaming content is an addition to basic internet access. You will need the same sort of internet modem equipment you have now for your computer access. To then access streaming television content you may be all set with a newer model smart TV, or for older models you may need a separate device, such as Roku or Apple TV or Google Chromecast. Once you own the device you can access both free and paid subscription providers. (For example: Netflix, Amazon Prime, Britbox, Hulu, YouTube TV and many, many others.)

What's in it for the Town of Lubec?

Q. We have internet service now, so why get the town involved in a fiber network?

A. The Town is involved because many of the outlying areas of Lubec are unserved or underserved by current internet providers. Private investors, such as Spectrum and Consolidated, are unlikely to expand to those areas. Grant money to municipalities is currently available, and by supporting this investment in Lubec's future we all benefit.

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Q. The school has a strong internet service, so why do we need this?

A. Strong service is present at the school, but what happens when our students go home? Access at school is only part of the equation. We need to offer affordable and reliable service throughout our community so that homework can be done at home rather than in a car in front of the library or the parking lot at Lyons Variety, much as we are grateful to both places.

Q. Will businesses find better access?

A. Yes, we will be able to offer enhanced services for business customers based on the business needs to include priority emergency service, enhanced technical support, and strong symmetrical service. Having these services available throughout the Town will be an incentive for business to locate in Lubec.

Q. How will healthcare services be improved?

A. A strong, reliable fiber network internet service will allow for more telehealth service. Older or disabled citizens will be able to visually interact with medical service providers saving on trips to Machias, or Bangor, and allowing for longer and safer time in their homes in Lubec.

What is the process to get there?

Q. How long will all this take before we see full service?

A. Once bond and grant funding is secured Axiom estimates no more than 2 years:

- Pole licensing and make ready 8-10 months
- Construction 3-4 months
- Home connections 2-4 months

Q. When will the Town apply for funding, and how?

A. Grants are available for the start up and research, for which we have already applied. In October 2022 an application will be submitted for the infrastructure grant, critical to the build out of the network.

What will it cost to subscribe?

Q. Do I have to take the full highest level to get good service, and what are the subscription costs?

A. Current plans are to offer three levels of service to year round customers with higher symmetrical speeds readily available if needed. Monthly rates offered will be:

- 50/50Mbps \$59.99
- 100/100Mbps \$64.99
- 250/250Mbps \$109.99

Q. When can I sign up?

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A. NOW! We are asking you to drop by or email the town office just to show your interest in pre-subscribing. We will then contact you when funding and contracts are in place to complete and early sign up. The estimated \$99 early sign up charge will be held and applied to your bill when the lines are in place. Your initial hookup for your home will also be free. We need pre-subscribers to start the ball rolling, to show the funders that Lubec is serious about this, and to encourage others to subscribe in the coming 2 years. Without subscribers there can be no network.

Q. Will there be seasonal rates?

A. Perhaps. We haven't finalized this. Keep in mind, this project will be owned by the Town. To keep costs covered by the subscribers, we need to keep those fees at the levels described. We may offer a discount to seasonal subscribers but require an annual up front payment rather than the month to month rate to year round purchasers.

Q. Is there help to cover the cost for lower income folks?

A. YES!! The ACP, Affordable Connectivity Program, offers help to those who qualify. Find more information at the Federal Communications Commission, [fcc.gov](https://www.fcc.gov). The website description states:

“The affordable Connectivity Program is an FCC benefit that helps ensure that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, healthcare and more.

“The benefit provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price.”

If your family qualifies for SNAP, Medicaid, SSI, WIC, Veterans Pension or Survivor Benefits among other programs you may well qualify.

Q. What does the subscription price provide? Will I need to buy equipment in addition?

A. The subscription to the fiber network will work just like your current internet service. You get connected to the internet. Your modem for a household network, and any additional equipment to access streaming television will be extra, just as they are now.

What will it cost us to build it?

Q. Is the Town paying for all this, and how much?

A. This is a tax neutral proposal. Taxes will not increase to pay for the broadband fiber network. The total estimated cost in the Axiom proposal for the network buildup to serve all of Lubec is \$4.6 million. Much of that will be reduced through grants, and other savings such as the network box already installed at the Town Office to serve Grand Manan. We estimate we will need to borrow, most likely through a bond, \$1.7 million for 20 years. The payments on that bond will come from the subscribers to the service. Axiom provided a conservative example showing an estimated payment on the bond that would be covered annually by 388 subscribers.

Q. What funding is available and are we taking advantage of it?

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A. We have some ARPA funds available for the early efforts. We have been approved for a small start up grant to cover the costs of the survey and other early research and communications. We will apply primarily for the federal/state funds available through the ConnectMaine Authority. We have every expectation of qualifying for a grant given the extent of the unserved and underserved areas in Lubec, and the possibility of other communities coming on board. We will not be asking taxpayers to support this effort. The cost will be on the subscribers, so SIGN UP EARLY!

What happens once it is built?

Q. Who will own all this fiber?

A. The network will be owned by the Town of Lubec.

Q. Who manages it and services it, and will customer service be good?

A. While the infrastructure, the network, is owned by the Town, our contract will be with Axiom to manage the program and provide service. Axiom is already providing management in locations near us including Roque Bluffs and the Cranberry Islands. Axiom is located in Machias and we are confident the service is will be good.

Q. What happens when repairs or updates to the system are need? What about an ice storm or other disaster?

A. The Town will maintain insurance for most events and standard maintenance or repairs are covered by the subscription fees.

Q. What happens once the bond is paid?

A. Once the bond is paid through subscriber fees over the years, the revenue will then come to the Town in part to be used for maintenance and insurance, and also as income.

For more information contact The Lubec Broadband Committee through the Town Office.